

Bureau of Land Management

Central Montana Resource Advisory Council

REPORT TO THE MONUMENT MANAGER ON THE UPPER MISSOURI WILD AND SCENIC RIVER

MARCH 2002

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Central Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC) has been looking into visitor use, outfitter usage, and related issues along the Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River prior to the monument designation.

II. BACKGROUND

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument has recently been the subject of national attention and local concern. The approaching Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (2003-2006) is already attracting more and more people to the area.

The Central Montana RAC took on the task of looking at visitor use and outfitter usage along the river corridor. The RAC created the Upper Missouri RAC Subgroup to deliberate these issues and provide the RAC with recommendations. The Subgroup met seven times since February 23, 2001, and provided the RAC with 17 recommendations to consider.

The RAC discussed and finalized the Subgroup recommendations as well as one additional recommendation at our January, 2002 meeting and at a special meeting held on March 8, 2002.

III. MOTIONS APPROVED WITH FULL CONSENSUS

The following motions have been approved by the Central Montana Resource Advisory Council with full consensus and are forwarded to you for your consideration and implementation.

☐ COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENTS AT CAMPSITES

While commercial development are generally not encouraged, each commercial permit application will be evaluated based on its support of management objectives and the maintenance of the outstanding scenic and natural characteristics of the river corridor. There will be no permanent facilities (buildings, parking areas, etc.) devoted to commercial developments on BLM lands. However, commercial sales or rentals of items that may advance management objectives (for example, portable toilets), may be allowed within Level 1 sites-those major entry points to the river.

☐ CAMPING OPPORTUNITIES

Important camping areas, such as the Level 2 sites Eagle Creek and Slaughter River, will accommodate both outfitters and private boaters.

Improve the design of the popular Level 2 sites such that competition among sites is reduced. Engage qualified landscape architects with knowledge of arid-semi arid vegetation conditions to assist in prototype models of campsite design.

The BLM will pursue easements on private land for camping opportunities in strategic locations along the river. The BLM will clarify the liability questions surrounding leases, easements and access.

☐ **THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AT CAMPSITES OR WITHIN FLOATING PARTIES**

Parties of 33 people or fewer could go down the river without a permit. Parties of 34-50 would require a special recreation use permit from the BLM which would allow for the BLM to make decisions on dispersal and launch days to manage impacts to the river.

☐ **LINKAGE OF CAMPSITES TO HIKING OPPORTUNITIES**

Communication vehicles should provide information about restrictions and private land issues adjacent to Level 1, 2, and 3 campsites. Conservation easements for recreation, such as at Little Sandy, should be identified on maps.

☐ **PARKING FACILITIES**

Parking facilities will be provided only at Level 1 sites.

☐ **GUIDING VISITOR BEHAVIORS**

Provide visitors with a simple card or insert with the river map on major behavior restrictions, responsibilities, personal risks, fire safety, and penalties (use of firewood, disposal of waste, etc.)

☐ **FIREWOOD**

Discourage the use of firewood from the vegetated areas along the river. Let people know that firewood is extremely scarce. Encourage campers to carry wood on boats. Encourage the use of gas stoves or charcoal for cooking. Provide guidelines for dealing with the ash from charcoal.

☐ **HUMAN WASTE AND REFUSE**

Portable toilets will be required for all overnight campers. The BLM will construct a dump station at Judith Landing.

☐ **IMPACT MONITORING**

Identify indicators and standards to serve as trigger mechanisms to indicate when problems must be addressed. Once indicators are developed provide visitors with monitoring cards at each launch site that can be filled out on a voluntary basis. The BLM will do consistent, standardized monitoring.

❑ LEVEL OF CAMPSITE DEVELOPMENT

Level 1, Developed public access site and campground: Campsites at road access points to the river are Wood Bottom, Coal Banks, Judith Landing, Woodhawk and Kipp. With the exception of Woodhawk, where infrastructure development will be sustained at the current level, these sites could have potable water, shelters, parking lots, picnic tables, vault toilets, check-in stations, boat launches, planted trees, interpretive signs, campground host facilities, and other infrastructure improvements that accommodate the transition from the highway system to the river corridor.

Level 2, Developed boat camp: Campsites at recreation locations that have experienced high levels of traditional use. These sites include Eagle Creek, Slaughter River, Hole-in-the Wall, and Little Sandy. Moderate levels of infrastructure may be encountered, including shelters, toilets, planted vegetation, irrigation, hardened campsites, and informational signs (signs at existing infrastructure only, such as on the walls of vault toilets). Administrative and emergency road access may be possible at Eagle Creek, Slaughter River, and Little Sandy.

Allow public access with evidence of a county road into the Hole-in-the-Wall Campground that allows hand carrying of non-motorized craft to or from the river. Infrastructure for boat launches or take-outs will not be constructed.

Level 3, Primitive boat camp: Sites are marked on maps and display modest but visible campsite signs from the river. Vegetation management may occur on established sites, including irrigation and artificial regeneration of trees. Fire rings are provided, but no other manufactured infrastructure developments, such as toilets, shelters, or picnic tables are allowed.

Level 4, Undeveloped public land: BLM lands without any infrastructure improvements. Only natural vegetation is present on the site.

❑ SIGNAGE FOR PUBLIC LANDS AND CAMPSITE

Establish guidelines for small campsite sign placement on all Level 1-3 campsites. Signs may be placed that delineate private land boundaries or other sites that need to be marked (for example, on trails adjacent to private lands). Work with private landowners to identify the types of marking that are sensitive and fit well with the landscape.

❑ DURATION OF STAY WITHIN CAMPSITES

From the Saturday prior to the observed Memorial Day through the Sunday after Labor Day (Same as seasonal boating restrictions), there is a two consecutive overnight limit on camping at Level 2, 3, or 4 sites.

❑ THE USE OF INFORMATION TO DIRECT USE

Provide clear information on the campground classification system and identify all Level 1, 2 and 3 sites. Listings should be explicit and complete about the facilities provided, other nearby features, and any behavioral restrictions. Level 4 camping opportunities will not be identified in different communication media, but people will be made aware that unmarked, undeveloped Level 4 opportunities exist, and they may camp anywhere on BLM lands.

❑ INTERPRETATION LEVELS

Limit on-site interpretation to infrastructure at Level 1 or 2 sites. Provide annotations to reference material on maps and other information products. Adhere to the principle that less is better.

❑ ROLE OF OUTFITTERS

The subgroup affirms a statement of principle; the commercial permittees, the river outfitters, provide substantial benefits to river visitors and local economics, and they should be sustained.

❑ ALLOCATION SYSTEM

Continue to contract with the University of Missoula to work with the subgroup and RAC to determine a system for access that is equitable to all user groups, to determine when and if such a system should be implemented, and to report in one year.

❑ PROPOSED FEE SYSTEM

The BLM needs to prepare a schedule of proposed fees for individuals floating the river and present it to the RAC subgroup. It would be a fee demonstration site. Also need logistics of collecting fees.

V. RECOMMENDATION FORWARDED WITHOUT FULL CONSENSUS

The following recommendation was passed by the RAC with the fallback option of voting. The RAC feels this recommendation needs to be considered and implemented with the other recommendations mentioned above.

❑ MORATORIUM ON RIVER OUTFITTERS

While developing a series of indicators and the details of a fair and equitable system for any future river allocations, the RAC recommends a one-year extension of the moratorium on river outfitters and it will not be extended.

VI. MINORITY OPINIONS OF RECOMMENDATIONS NOT REACHING FULL CONSENSUS

When the RAC is unable to reach full consensus as we have on the "Moratorium on River Outfitters" we offer an opportunity for the minority opinion to comment. The following is testimony in regard to that minority opinion:

Extending the moratorium for one year without any extension beyond the one year (2003) makes a "feel good" recommendation with no real basis in fact. If the moratorium cannot be extended in the spring of 2003 to cover future years, it does not preclude a NEW motion to be made by a RAC with a minimum of five new members calling for a moratorium going beyond 2002 to include 2003 and the years beyond.

The moratorium was originally instituted because of a rise in numbers on the river and a fear that it could get out of hand before an allocation method was put into place. The past two years has shown no appreciable increase in numbers on the river but the moratorium has nevertheless been kept in force with the majority recommendation calling for no extension beyond this coming floating season...which means the moratorium will not be extended and the RAC's hands are tied with the current caveat right

when the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial begins to gain momentum. It would seem more consistent with projections to have approved the moratorium for one more year with no portion of the recommendation mentioning further approval or non-approval beyond the spring of 2003.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The Central Montana Resource Advisory Council in conjunction with the RAC subgroup and the public have spent many hours preparing and deliberating on the recommendations submitted to you for your implementation.

We will be looking forward to a response from you in regard to these recommendations and which ones you plan to implement and on what schedule. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the RAC members.